

THE ORGANIZATION OF SELECTIVE PERCEPTUAL SENSITIVITIES

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## ABSTRACT

In line with the increasing appreciation and acceptance of the psychic reality of perceptual experience, this paper offers an experience-near and clinically relevant conceptualization of the perceptual world of the person as it is structured developmentally within the context of the caretaking environment. Drawing on contemporary mother-infant research findings specific aspects of the dialogue between child and caretaker are examined with respect to their role in shaping unique perceptual orientations which, I shall contend become structured as enduring experiential reference points functionally linked to patterned modes of self regulation. This paper aims to provide a framework for comprehending the micro-split second events which, for the experientially vulnerable person, constitute the principle subjective happenings which organize self experience. It is argued that the psychoanalytic situation is a context of personal meaning facilitating the unfolding of the patient's uniquely patterned perceptual organization. Finally, it is suggested that empathic communications include a focus on structure and process as a way of facilitating the patient's understanding of unarticulated realms of experience. In so doing, this approach enhances the patient's reflective competence, thereby generating more reliable affect regulatory capacities. And, in so doing, encouraging further collaboration in the search for comprehending the patient's world of personal meanings which lies at the center of psychoanalytic inquiry.

In recent times, a renewed appreciation of the significance of perceptual processes has led a number of investigators to accent the perceptual dimensions of human experience in their consideration of specific aspects of psychoanalytic theory and technique (see for example, Slap, 1987; Joseph, 1987). Among the current contributions to this clinically relevant discourse, and most relevant to the subject of this writing, Evelyn Schwaber, in a series of papers (1981, 1983, 1985, 1986), has argued cogently for an introspective model that figures the individual's perceptual organization as the most fundamental component of the psychoanalytic method of data gathering. Placing a hierarchical premium on perceptual processes as they pertain to the recovery of "nuances of experience" (1987, p. 912), she presents a perspective on clinical attunement that offers new possibilities for extending the limits of empathic inquiry. Through the medium of several therapeutic vignettes Schwaber illustrates a mode of analytic listening that is characterized by a special attention to the myriad but subtle interplays between patient and analyst which facilitates the illumination of moments of experience that had become reflectively "lost" (1986, p. 912) to the patient. Schwaber writes,

"When we sharpen our attunement to such clinical moments—a shift in affect or state, turn of phrase, the transient appearance of a symptom or old behavior—and consider our participation, as the patient has perceived it and as a central element in the transference, we facilitate the

emergence of a deepening realm of psychic experience. Reconstruction of added dimensions of conflictual and defensive phenomena and of the context in which they were expressed is more likely to ensue and to proceed on the patient's initiative, for the patient will have a sense of recognition that something familiar has been articulated." [pp. 929-930].

Looking back twenty years, Kohut's early and later writings (1966, 1971, 1972, 1977, 1984) have significantly influenced the shift in clinical attunement recommended by Schwaber, and to the increasing acceptance within the psychoanalytic community of the legitimacy of perceptual experience in analytic theory and practice. It is the contention of this paper that taken together the contributions of Kohut and Schwaber support a view of the psychoanalytic situation as a context of personal meaning facilitating the unfolding of the patient's uniquely patterned perceptual organization. Whereas this approach to the psychoanalytic situation recommends a shift from a perspective centered on objective verification of a patient's perceptions, to an appreciation and acceptance of the "psychic reality" of perceptual experience, I believe there remains a compelling need for a more clinically relevant treatment of the ways we conceptualize the nature of perceptual structures and how we utilize such conceptual reference points in the psychoanalytic process. To this end, drawing on contemporary mother-infant

research findings I shall suggest a set of experience-near formulations, offered as a complementary framework within which we may begin to better comprehend and technically address the multidimensional aspects of human experience which Kohut and Schwaber have so exquisitely articulated.

### The Primacy of Perceptual Experience in the Formation of Psychic Structures

Contemporary infant researchers have for years offered compelling evidence of the primacy of perceptual experience. In particular, Emde (1981) and Stern (1985), bringing together data from a host of observational studies, have figured perceptual activity as mediating the ability of the infant to monitor and abstract from the total human context, invariant dimensions of self experience as well as invariant properties of the environment. According to Stern, the infant's perceptions at the start are directed toward the sensory properties of the experiential field in which he or she is a part. These include, visual, auditory, kinesic and tactile stimulations, their variable intensities, as well as their timing and sequencing. From the earliest periods of development the infant is found to be capable of ordering complex patterns that characterize the caretaker's total range of interactive stimulations. In so doing, the infant creates, "a world of perceptual unity" (p.51), from which a sense of continuity and order is established and maintained. Stern's investigations, point to the infant as actively engaged in the "creation of



expectancies" (Bruner, 1975, p.12) and the evaluation of deviations from the norm he or she has come to expect.

Stern's conception of the infant's emergent world of perceptual unity underscores not only the developing infant's prestructured capacity to monitor and abstract invariant physical properties of the environment, but the capacity to monitor and abstract invariant affective experiences of self and the affective states of the other as well. Sufficient data exists to state that, this process of selective inclusion of meaningful elements of experience constitutes a fundamental organizing activity facilitating the consolidation of a host of psychological structures. For example, Stern refers to one aspect of perceptual attunement as "interaffectivity" (p.132). His use of this term is intended to convey the infant's capacity to recognize and "match...the feeling state as experienced within and seen on or in another" (p.132). Stern's observations highlight the infant's heightened perceptual orientation and preference for shared affective states between self and other and the capacity to perceive the extent and goodness of match between itself and the caretaking environment. In considering the development of basic motives, Emde (1981, 1983, 1988) has similarly emphasized the infant's propensity to monitor affective experience, both pleasurable and unpleasurable, including perceptually mediated moments of affective sharing as primarily important in the structuralization of the self system. According to Emde (1983) the infant's perceptual capacities are suited to identify unique

configurations of experience involving self and other, forming the core constituents of a sense of continuity. Together, these studies stress the very important finding that recurrent affect states embedded in specific contexts of experience and secondarily imbued with personal meanings attain structural coherence with respect to perceptual processes.

Furthermore, corresponding to the differentiation and consolidation of discrete affective structures or coherent affect states, perceptual processes are recognized as mediating the organization of those elements of experience which constitute the person's unique network of self regulating strategies (see for example, Stechler & Carpenter, 1967; Sroufe, 1979; Stechler, 1982; Lichtenberg, 1983). In the context of the numerous recurrent exchanges between infant and caretaker, the infant's self experience for better or worse, is regulated by the caretaker's capacity to read the affective state of the infant, and shape the nature of his or her response to the infant. During these exchanges the infant undergoes affective state transformations that "vary along with the parent's behavioral themes and variations" (Stern, 1985, p. 76). With each newly emergent self organization the infant engages in a new social dialogue with its caretakers offering a new potential for elaborating, consolidating and increasing the current array of affective experiences and acquiring new regulatory capacities. Winnicott's (1953) extensive discussion of the child's selective identification and use of transitional objects as a concrete means of mastering areas of conflict in

object relations reflects one aspect of this ongoing, perceptually mediated regulatory process.

As I interpret this data, these recurrent, daily, even moment to moment "events" offer the infant the opportunity to selectively identify and abstract from the total human context, those invariant affective experiences and invariant regulatory elements that come to shape the organization of self regulatory structures. This relationship between perception and regulatory activity may be clearly seen in the videotaped observational methods of the infant researcher. Through frame by frame film analysis of behavioral interactions, the infant can be seen to be highly sensitive to social exchanges and capable of influencing the nature of these interactions with a range of responses (Stern, 1977). Of crucial importance to the subject of this paper, the infant's reactivity, which includes both activation and inhibition of behaviors, occurs at the split-second level and has been termed "micro-momentary responsivity" (Haggard & Isaacs, 1966, p.156). So rapid is the onset and termination of many of the infant's behavioral strategies that most often they operate outside of conscious awareness. Identifying a range of engagement-disengagement behaviors and viewed as early forms of defenses, Stern has documented the split-second responsivity that occurs and which serves to modulate self and object experiences.

As stated above, through a process of selective abstraction and ordering of the various physical, behavioral and affective properties of the infant's experiential world, the infant's varied



behaviors, including reflexive responses, are transformed exigently into ongoing, patterned modes of reactivity that are purposeful and functional within specific interactional contexts. Researchers (Campos & Sternberg, 1981; Sorce & Emde, 1981) have demonstrated this structure building activity in the infant's social referencing behaviors observed in the experimental playroom. The infant confronted with situations of uncertainty monitors and responds in accordance with the mother's emotional signals. The mother's expressions of fear or anger typically generate avoidance behaviors while expressions of interest or joy generate further curiosity and uninhibited exploration. As a regulatory activity, social referencing refers to a "general process whereby a person of any age seeks out emotional information from a significant other in order to make sense of a situation that is otherwise ambiguous and uncertain (Emde, 1988, p.32)." Sufficient data exists to state, that as a general process such activities constitute the central organizing processes which underlies the formation of unique perceptual/affective orientations, as well as the articulation and consolidation of patterned self regulating tendencies. I refer to this process of perceptual recognition and ordering of the various physical and affective properties of one's experiential world, an ontological given, as the principle of abstraction in psychological structure formation.

To summarize, in the above scheme perceptual activity is figured as the most fundamental component in the organization of experiential and regulatory structures. One cannot speak of inner

experience without speaking of perception. There exists, without a doubt, a process relationship between perceptual processes and acts of self regulation. Furthermore, perceptual activity operating at the micro split-second level of organization provides the developing child with the means for constructing a unique experiential world and the resources for sustaining the affective conditions of this world within optimal limits.

### The Formation of Selective Perceptual Sensitivities

One natural structural by-product of the child's and adult's capacity to perceive and give meaning to various properties of the given contexts of experience, is the consolidation of uniquely personal perceptual orientations, which I refer to as "selective perceptual sensitivities". These structures, I contend, are enduring experiential reference points which may be clinically observed to be functionally linked to patterned modes of self regulation. I believe they are ubiquitous and constitute a central element in the organization of experiential structures.<sup>1</sup>

A brief description of the experiential contexts in which these proposed structures are formed will serve to clarify the significance of these formulations in my overall attempt to understand the multidimensional aspects of perceptual experience.

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<sup>1</sup> The relationship between perception and self regulation has been fundamental to psychoanalytic theory beginning with Freud's earliest and later contributions (1895, 1923, 1940). Others, for example, Hartmann (1939), Schur (1953), and Arlow (1969) to mention just a few, have stressed the functional role of perception in the maintenance of psychic stability.

Simply stated, we know that relatively healthy psychological development relies upon the parental caretaker's capacity to adjust the nature of their responsiveness to fit the ever shifting and changing affective requirements of the child. Corresponding to the child's evolving affective requirements and in response to the progressive transformations that are occurring in the growing child, the optimally attuned parent undergoes a shift in how the child is experienced thereby facilitating the required alteration in the nature of the caretaker's responsiveness. Under these optimal conditions, the child's emergent self structures, phase appropriately colored by various developmentally early cognitive/affective constellations, epigenetically undergo progressive transformation. When parents are unable to optimally respond to their child's changing developmental needs, then the child is forced to accommodate to the needs of the parental caretakers. In essence, there is an experiential shift in the child, as he or she attempts to negotiate a compromise between the central strivings of his or her own unfolding experiential world, and the personality of the parents.

Developmentally, selective perceptual sensitivities, I suspect, crystallize at the point where the child's unfolding affective requirements intersect with the multiple and complex variations in caretaker responsiveness.<sup>2</sup> At these recurrent

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<sup>2</sup> Although this paper emphasizes the recurrent developmental derailments in caretaker attunement and responsiveness as the essential elements in the formation of selective sensitivities, the crystallization of new sensitivities and/or the reactivation or intensification of previously formed perceptual sensitivities

experiential nodal points, the child can be said to be selectively attuned to his or her affective experience and, to the presence or absence of specific responses from the world of caretakers. In this state of heightened perceptual acuity, the child abstracts from the total experiential gestalt selective elements which cumulatively contribute to: one, the articulation of specific perceptual orientations in the form of selective perceptual sensitivities, and two, the abstraction and consolidation of specific elements of experience which may come to constitute the formal aspects of regulating self experience. In this way, the evolving and shifting perceptual orientations, equip the child with the means of selectively monitoring the overall affective state of the self and the affective atmosphere of the human surround. From the host of recurrent transactions, each uniquely shaped by the participants, the infant/child constructs a representational world (Sandler & Rosenblatt, 1962) or set of prototypic memories (Stern, 1988) as enduring personal experiential reference points. In addition, they selectively orient the child toward specific aspects of his or her own autonomous, self initiated activities, such as occurs in play, and aspects of the exchange with objects facilitating their isolation and abstraction from the total experiential gestalt and potentially utilized as sources of affect regulation. The cumulative significance under optimal conditions is the consolidation of a host of reliable means of regulating self

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may be observed as a natural by-product of traumatic experiences (ie., loss, illness) occurring at any point in the course of life.



experience. Herein lies the experiential milieu from which modes of defensiveness or self regulation (Klein, 1976) emerge.

Essentially, what I am describing are recurring "states" which are characterized by an intensification of perceptual, reflective and regulatory activity. Developmental progression, at such points, may on the one hand, be facilitated when the infant or child, as a means of regulating a disturbing experience, is challenged to explore a variety of creative pathways to modulate or alter the distressful affective condition. To the extent that moderate derailments in parental attunement and responsiveness are inevitable, such accommodative shifts are a natural developmental occurrence. For example, selective perceptual sensitivities, organized in relation to a particular dimension of the object world may guide the child toward the emotionally available adult, who may then be utilized as a transitional object filling in experiential and regulatory voids and thereby contributing to the consolidation of a more functional self system (ie., the consolidation of a positive sense of self, of other and self with other). Herein, the organization of selective perceptual sensitivities facilitate the often observed search for new object experiences as solutions to developmental trauma. I believe that a study of selective perceptual sensitivities structured in relation to specific aspects of the object world may serve us well in understanding the

emotional resilience of traumatized children. <sup>3</sup> As conceptualized above, selective perceptual sensitivities, as modes of perceiving, particularize the unique experiences of self, of other and self with other (Stern, 1985). Once formed, such perceptual orientations define the person's unique subjective field of experience and influence the selective abstraction of meaningful experiential elements from the ongoing dialogue between self and other. The evolving perceptual orientations, provide shape and substance to the formal features of subsequent self regulatory activity. This last statement is in accord with the many recent findings suggesting that specific modes of defensiveness develop in early childhood as a by product of the interactions with the object world.

An appreciation of the selective inclusion and exclusion of experiential elements in the organization of regulatory structures is an essential contribution afforded by Kohut's delineation of the process of "transmuting internalizations" (1971, 1977). However, the conception of uniquely patterned perceptual orientations, defining the abstraction of personally meaningful elements of experience offers a way of explaining the process of transmuting internalization without relying on concepts that render

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<sup>3</sup> The work of Christopher Bollas (1987) as it pertains to the persistent need in the more vulnerable person to seek out a "transformational object", as an "internal recognition of the need for ego repair" (p. 22) is noteworthy here in that it reflects a shared perspective with respect to pre-reflective perceptual processes in the individual's search for experiences that may contribute to a new sense of self.

psychological activity in terms of spatial metaphors (Schafer, 1972, 1976).

Selective Perceptual Sensitivities and the Structure of  
Experiential Vulnerabilities

The evidence is accumulating from developmental psychology to support the statement that the articulation of healthy psychological structures is profoundly impeded by conditions of chronic failures in parental attunement. To the extent that the child's caretakers chronically fail to appreciate the child's shifting affect states the child is then forced to accommodate to the experiential conditions of a less than optimal environment. As such, when developmental trauma prevails in the form of chronic failures in the caretakers capacity to correctly perceive and appropriately respond to the child's unfolding affective requirements (Demos, 1984) the child's self initiated regulatory capacities are compromised and selective perceptual sensitivities become functionally linked to these early experiential (affective) constellations and to less mature modes of self regulation. The latter taking the form of ineffective reactive strategies aimed at altering or restoring a particular aspect of self experience, as well as urgent and misdirected efforts to evoke a needed response from the environment. Herein we can speak of an arrest in the organization and regulation of self experience. Under these conditions, the child's recurring affect states represent moments of heightened vulnerability. The child's subjective experience of

an object world characterized by failed comprehension and faulty responsiveness, hereafter become enduring experiential reference points.

Characteristically when selective sensitivities crystallize within the context of chronic failures of the caretaking environment to "accurately perceive and understand" (Demos, 1984, p. 18) the child's disturbing experiences a pathogenic state of affairs is typically established which encourages a further breakdown in the empathically guided dialogue between the caregiver and the child. Taken separately this breakdown centers on the caregivers failure, due to an inability to comprehend the nature of the child's experiences, to validate the legitimacy of the child's emerging "sensitivities" thus encouraging their dissociation and the formation of a profound sense of shame accompanied by a self critical judgmental attitude toward this area of vulnerability.

As I see it, the consolidation of selective perceptual sensitivities, structured with regard to developmentally early experiential requirements, secondarily elaborated by a system of personal meanings, forms the core of a person's vulnerability. Indeed, the organization of perceptual sensitivities establishes a structural condition that insures the recurrent activation of disturbing and/ or disorganizing affective experiences. As a consequence, less firmly consolidated positive affect states are recurrently eclipsed. In other words, the violation of specific selective sensitivities in the experientially vulnerable person



activates uniquely structured "self states" (Kohut, 1977) or "malignant moods" (Bollas, 1987, p.100). These recurrently activated experiential states are characterized by a further heightening of the particular area of sensitivity contributing to a propensity to experience less than optimal, conflict laden negative self experiences, as well as alterations in the perception of others. Evidently, this state of affairs contributes to an increase in the person's vulnerability due to a condition in which the heightened attunement to select, disturbing aspects of self and other, (viewed here as a non-defensive phenomena), contributes to successive disturbing affective experiences. This often leads to a progressive crystallization of more malignant alterations in one's sense of self and/or other.

As an illustration, one patient, Mr. B., a successful senior executive was acutely sensitive to the presence of specific dysphoric affects (ie., sadness, fear, shame) which had acquired intensely negative meanings due to the severe limitations in the capacity of his parents to appreciate the affective experience of their child and respond appropriately. As a consequence, the presence of any negative affects, which could be caused by a multiplicity of subtle interpersonal experiences, once activated, generated, on one level a state of self doubt with respect to his sense of masculine self efficacy. In this state of self diminishment he then experienced an additional and heightened sensitivity to the nature of his cognitive/affective experience. This introspective state was characterized by rather prolonged

search for specific "depressive" feelings and thoughts, which, if discovered, lead progressively to a state of of anxious concern as to whether or not he was suicidal. From this point on Mr. B could not rest until he had reassured himself that he was not like his father. Historically, his father had attempted suicide numerous times during his lifetime. As such, on one very important level, Mr. B. remained perceptually on guard against any "depressive" elements of experience which threatened to merge him with his father. On another level, his experience was complicated and his vulnerability exacerbated by a resurgence and intensification in the nature of his sensitivity to the quality of his interpersonal exchanges. In order to modulate the self evident heightened sensitivity in interpersonal situations, Mr. B. at this point relied heavily upon alcohol and cocaine to restore his self regard and confidence. Should his efforts at self medication prove futile, as they often were, and further evidence of his failings as a man continued, Mr.B.'s sense of shame crystallized around the conviction that he was now perceived in the same manner in which his "mentally deranged" father was perceive by his childhood community. He was now no longer able to consider himself normal. Rather, he had progressed to a state of merger with his suicidal father. In this consolidated state of merger he withdrew from all social activities and conducted all business by telephone, lest his "facade" be recognized by others. This sate of affairs continued until sufficient positive affirmative experiences accumulated and gradually contributed to a reinstatement of his sense of

differentiation and positive self regard and with it the sense that others viewed him positively.

As this case illustrates, it only appears, objectively speaking, that a single realm of experience is dominant at any particular moment in time (see, Stern 1984, p.31). Simultaneously however, other areas of experience may be activated when unique sensitivities are pre-reflectively registered and processed at a different level of organization (Neisser, 1976). It is basic to an appreciation of this understanding that once a vulnerable area of experience has been activated there is a tendency for a corresponding heightening of one's selective sensitivities often contributing to recurrent "violations" and then cumulatively, to patterned, sequential alterations in the experience of self and/or other. Once consolidated, this new transformed experiential state forms the basis for the most archaic modes of experience. At these archaic levels of organizations it may be more appropriate to refer to a "selective sensitivity syndrome".

Most often, as seen in the case of Mr.B. one also observes during episodes of increased vulnerability a continued and more desperate reliance on less than optimal modes of self regulation. It is for this reason that the activation in the transference of selective sensitivities in conjunction with the individual's primary developmental need for a relationship to an idealized parent figure, for mirroring affirmation, and for a sense of affective sameness with another, implicit in Kohut's (1971, 1977, 1984) articulation of the vicissitudes of self disorders, is most

often accompanied by a heightened experiential vulnerability and a tendency toward destructive behavioral enactments. It is precisely the nature of selfobject experiences that the corresponding perceptual organization not only establishes the potential for a "new beginning" (Ornstein, 1974), through the activation of structure promoting transference fantasy constructs, but establishes as well, the seeds for the appearance of disturbing, often disorganizing affective experiences.

The sustained or periodic activation of various dimensions of selfobject experience, accordingly, may be seen as the mobilization of specific "selfstates" characterized by degrees of heightened sensitivity to the presence or absence of specific features of self and other. For instance, persons with profound needs for mirroring affirmation, are perceptually monitoring, most often outside of awareness, their thoughts, feelings and/ or actions, as well as being acutely attuned to signs that convey the affective attitudes of the environment. The personal meanings attributed to such perceptions support either an enhanced sense of self regard or instigate a sense of diminishment. Similarly, idealizations and experiences of twinship are initiated, sustained and disrupted by the selective perception of various qualities of the other and the personal meanings attributed to them.

#### Implications for Understanding and Explaining in the Psychoanalytic Process

The movement, from transference based perceptions to the



meaningful moments of past interactional experiences and the reconstructions that may then be possible, an important aspect of analytic work has been described extensively in the literature. Schwaber (1983, 1986) in particular, has elucidated the movement from the dimension of immediate experience to the dimension of meaning and the reconstructive interpretations with significant depth to recommend her cases be studied as beautiful illustrations of the historical antecedents which shape unique perceptual orientations, the cognitive/affective structures derived from these developmental experiences, and their expression and ultimate transformation in the transference. As the reader follows the unfolding transference configurations, Schwaber's fine attunement to the subtle shifts in her patient leads to the illumination of the content of the patient's past and current negative experiences and the defensive activity which are linked to these experiential states. Specifically, by focusing on the experience of the current context, Schwaber (1983) articulates during one treatment situation, her patient's selective search for elements of similarity in her relationship to Dr. Schwaber, her sense of "disconnection" when such experiences are thwarted, and the patient's repeated attempts to realize a particular experience by structuring the therapeutic exchange. Schwaber's approach to the therapeutic dialogue is characterized by a search for content and meaning. Each perceptual event is utilized as a means of accessing meaning and historical antecedents. I would like to suggest as a complementary mode of analytic intervention a focus on structure

and process. In this approach, the therapist's understanding of the structural conditions which establish the patient's vulnerability, such as the nature of the patient's perceptual sensitivities is communicated to the patient as a precursor to increased exploration and elaboration of the complexity of the patient's experiential world.

As described above, a distinctive feature of "selective perceptual sensitivities" is that they are structured at a micro split-second level of organization. Alterations in the sense of the self and/or object may occur so rapidly and initiate regulatory responses so quickly that the instigating "perceptual event" often remains outside of conscious reflective awareness. Thus, unconsciously structured, such experiences remain reflectively lost to the patient and compromise any potential modulation that may be derived from conscious decentered introspective efforts.

Whereas the violation of our more vulnerable patient's "sensitivities", constitutes the intervening subjective event which generates observable shifts from one experiential state to another, I believe it is particularly important to promote as early as possible, an understanding of the unique structure of the patient's perceptual orientations as they become manifest in particular states. Including I would add, the unique patterning and sequential shifts that may occur, as a way of facilitating the patient's reflective awareness of the conditions of his or her experiential vulnerability. I have found, as occurred in the case of Mr. B., that a focus on structure and process is of immediate

therapeutic benefit in sensitizing the patient to the micro-organization of the events that have the greatest impact, both in the here and now, and in subsequent interactions. Equipped with this information, the patient gradually acquires a greater capacity to monitor subjective events that lead to experiential transformations. And, aided by a newly enhanced reflective vantage point from which to view himself or herself, the patient is invited to join the analyst in a collaborative search for meaning and the construction of the historical antecedents that are uniquely his or hers. Hence, the process of transforming experiential structures is begun by instigating a reflective process of the "subjective happenings" (Stern, 1984, p.4) and the regulatory activity which follows.

### Conclusion

The conceptualization of "selective perceptual sensitivities" is intended as a framework for comprehending a dimension of human experience and the motivational source of acts of self regulation. Although intended as a general theoretical framework, it is particularly useful in appreciating the micro-split second organization of perceptual sensitivities which instigate the "malignant regressions" (Balint, 1968) abundantly described in the literature. It offers the clinician an observational platform which facilitates the identification and clinical assessment of experiential and regulatory structures, suggesting as well specific interventive principles and the means of assessing therapeutic

change. Finally, with the conception of selective perceptual sensitivities functionally linked to patterned modes of regulating self experience our listening perspective becomes enhanced through a focus on the "world of microparticles" (Kohut, 1984). As an experience - near conceptualization it is clinically more adequate and illuminating because it guides our empathic investigations to the multidimensional aspects of the perceptual field which organizes and sustains the cognitive-affective structures that are at the heart of human experience.



Copy for  
Danny

I've already made some  
changes but who wants to  
hear you complain about my  
version to post offices. The real story  
is that I have a profound phobia to public  
office buildings that began when I was six.  
Anyway, that's material for another book.

# THE DOMINO THEORY OF LOVE RELATIONS

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Book TITLE

The Sensitivity FACTOR  
IN LIVING, LOVING AND WORKING

We need to re-write this paper and prepare an  
outline for book. Once we have outline we can  
put together treatment. Talk to you soon.

Jim

THE CONCEPT IS SIMPLE. The key to forming and maintaining intimate love relations is to pay attention to the little things.

Easier said than done. This is especially true when the elements of interpersonal chaos are invisible. Or so it seems.

Consider the following comment spoken by a man I shall call Adam, who summed up the current status of his eight year relationship by stating, "I can't put my finger on the all the reasons for it, but I no longer feel in love. Although there are many things I don't like about her, I can still say I love her, but I don't feel 'in' love. The passion is gone. I think I want to leave."

Now consider this statement, "We were so caught up with one another, I thought the world of him, now I hate him." The speaker, a young woman, lets call her Ellen, twenty-six years of age and married three years was astonished at the intensity with which the word "hate" rolled from her lips.

Adam and Ellen, very different stories, but each prey to subtle interpersonal events that can and very often do undermine the very fabric of a relationship. Until recently the nature of these events remained obscure to all. Now, due to new research findings, we can begin to glimpse the processes that lie at the heart of our interpersonal troubles. Lets take a closer look.

# I

INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS almost always begin enthusiastically or reach a point of mutual enthusiasm quickly. In beginning love relations this heightened joy and enthusiasm is expressed in a passionate preoccupation with each other. Displays of affection and frequent contact between the participants in their romantic duet are common. This is the phase when metaphorically speaking the dominoes are all standing and well balanced. Typically, during this beginning period no glaringly disturbing problems seem to be present. However, it is not uncommon for one or both of the partners to be fleetingly aware of something not quite right. Something registers, perhaps a disturbing tone of voice, or a word spoken or even a word unspoken resulting in an inadvertent hurt or offense. Most often these offenses are unrecognized, overlooked, trivialized or judged as evidence of one's over sensitivity. Caught in the joy of mutual attraction these fleeting, but disturbing experiences, are eclipsed by the intensity of the more positive feelings generated in a new relationship. They are quickly disregarded but seldom forgotten.

WE CAN ALL RECALL spending time with a new love partner when, in the midst of a conversation we take notice of some unintentional, but non the less disturbing comment or action. We give little meaning to it at the time. But, later that evening



alone with our thoughts the comment or act haunts us and gives rise to either angry or hurt feelings. We fall asleep. All is forgotten. Or is it.

Often such spontaneous impressions are loaded with personal meanings. Although not part of our daily thoughts, they non the less remain active and influence how we feel and behave toward ourselves and toward our new or ongoing love partners. I have labelled this area of self experience, the realm of "selective sensitivities". Simply stated, the term "selective sensitivity", refers to both subtle and gross areas of sensitivity that are shaped by our early experiences and are unique to each person. Everyone is different with respect to the things they are sensitive to. One person may be acutely sensitive to the "way" something is said rather than the words spoken. Another person may register the absence of a gesture. And a third individual may feel diminished or enraged by a seemingly innocuous event. For example, some years ago, during a psychotherapy consultation with a young woman, I sneezed while she was animatedly describing her exciting weekend with a new boyfriend with whom she "shared" many interests. After my sneeze she momentarily paused, offered a courteous "bless you", and proceeded with her account of the weekend. Everything seemed fine, except for one element. She was no longer animated. Her statements were spoken matter of factly, without the emotional dressing that made her story so interesting before the sneeze. At that time not knowing what contributed to the shift in her emotional state, I simply stopped her and shared my observation of the change in her. I wondered aloud what could have had an impact



upon her. She did not readily know but recognized that she felt different. I asked her to review the preceding moments with me, second by second, frame by frame. As we collaborated in our search for some understanding, doubting my own impression, I risked being seen for the fool and isolated the sneeze as the turning point in our conversation. I asked her to think, to reflect on any thoughts or feelings that may have registered even momentarily when I sneezed. Thinking for a moment she said, "yes, there was a thought, I said to myself, Louis has a cold." Continuing my inquiry, she acknowledged that for a moment she compared her state of health to mine, "Louis has a cold, I don't have a cold." This thought, she stated was followed by a series of rapid fire observations having to do with the many ways she and I were different. Since, for this woman we had already come to appreciate the importance of "sharing" many attributes in order for her to feel close to someone, it became evident that she had experienced a change in her perception of me. We were no longer alike. A new distance preempted the closeness she had previously felt. She consequently felt derailed from the smooth interactional dialogue we had developed.

Since this event, coupled with emerging new knowledge in the social sciences, it is the subtle events that occur in the exchanges between two individuals that have occupied my interest. I have come to believe that the study of the micro-moments between two persons is one of the most fruitful areas of research into the psychology of human relations. This orientation is offering new insights into the psychology of interpersonal experiences,

especially as they contribute to the decay of once cherished relationships. As knowledge in this area continues to expand, the seemingly disposable nature of relationships may hopefully be reversed.

## II

IN RECENT YEARS there has been an unprecedented advance in knowledge about human development. In the same way that Freud's, Interpretation of Dreams transformed how we thought about the psychological life of the individual, new knowledge stemming from new clinical studies and the study of infants and mothers in interaction with each other, is stirring an intellectual revolution that, more than ever is leading social scientists to question the very foundation of time honored ideas. One area of infant research, led by the work of Daniel Stern, has shed light on the new born's capacity, right from the start of life, to perceptually monitor and identify recurring patterns in his or her moment to moment, day to day interactions with the environment. Specifically, the infant has been shown to be capable of monitoring and responding to the emotions generated within himself or herself, as well as the emotional climate that defines the infant's human surround. The frame by frame study of films of the infant interacting with primary caretakers, shows the infant to be highly sensitive to social interactions and capable of influencing the

nature of these interactions with a host of behaviors. Of crucial importance, to the subject of this article, the infant's reactivity occurs at the split-second level and has been referred to by one researcher as "micro-momentary responsivity". Gradually, the infant's perceptions and reflexive reactions are transformed into patterned modes of perceiving and responding to specific aspects of self experience and specific aspects of the interpersonal world. From the many recurring transactions, the infant and later the child continuously constructs and revises his or her personal view of the world in which he or she resides. One natural by-product of the infant and later the developing child's capacity to perceive and give meaning to events in the interpersonal world, is the formation of unique perceptual orientations, which I referred to above as "selective sensitivities". Such perceptual orientations define our unique ways of experiencing ourselves alone, our experience of others, and our experience of ourselves in interaction with others. Clinical studies strongly suggest that "selective sensitivities" give rise to specific feelings. These sensitivities are formed when the early caretaking world fails to respond to our needs in the same way over and over again. Since it is impossible for any parent or any other substitute person to be perfectly attuned and responsive to the ever shifting feelings and needs of the child, such sensitivities exist in all of us. It is a matter of degree to what extent our specific sensitivities form the core of our inner personal world. That is, to what extent they give rise to disturbing feelings toward ourselves and others. The issue is a matter of the degree of vulnerability. Our



vulnerabilities and the ways in which we manage the feelings generated by the violation of our sensitivities involves three areas of self experience. The first, and primary, are all the ways we experience ourselves, sometimes referred to as our sense of self. Our sense of self can be predominantly coloured by positive feeling or it can be principally dominated by negative emotional attitudes. One's self esteem is determined by the degree in which positive or negative feeling dominate our daily image of ourselves. The second area of self experience involves all the ways we typically view others. The third area of self experience has to do with all the ways we experience ourselves with other people. For each of us there is a limited range of feelings that are experienced over and over again in each area. These recurring feelings toward ourselves and others, and the recurring feelings we have with different people define our unique personality. Whenever an area of sensitivity is violated any one or combination of the three realms of inner experience will become activated. The fact that any situation can activate an area of sensitivity and set of corresponding feelings is why some people have one experience of a person or situation, while another person experiences the same individual or situation entirely differently.

My clinical research, together with the findings from observational studies of infants interacting with their mothers, support the view that it is the subtle events that begin the processes that undermine even relationships that generally get off on the right footing. It is these innumerable subtle elements, that cumulatively shape every relationship for better or worse.



### III

ONE WOMAN, Jill, would describe the many blissful moments she shared with a man, John, whom she recently started dating. Then, often sandwiched in the middle of her glowing accounts of this new blossoming relationship, she expressed in one form or another uncertainty as to why she frequently felt unattractive, unintelligent and inadequate after spending time with John. I would listen carefully then ask her if she was aware of anything John said or did that, no matter how trivial it seemed, would leave her feelings so diminished. I inquired about the little things that bothered her when she was with John. Jill would typically respond with a very clear, "no nothing". Then after several moments of silent reflective thought, and half negating her perceptions she would state he sometimes seemed to give little attention to what she said. He seemed to pass over whatever she said very quickly." In this brief illustration, we can see Jill's momentary recognition of a lack of affirmation in the interaction. Although only a small part of the overall interaction between this couple it was a critical element in changing how Jill felt about herself.

As this example shows it is the seemingly little things, the subtle experiences that are passed over, that can change, how we feel toward ourselves and others. If repeated often enough, such experiences, will ultimately shift permanently how we feel toward our love partners. When this happens, the dominoes fall, the

relationship is over.

When the relationship continues however, these initial impressions, I have found, are often the telltales of future problems. A dramatic example is that of a male patient, Jonathan. This man ultimately ceased all sexual contact with his wife after the first year of marriage due to his acute sensitivity to how his wife instructed him to arouse her. Although from the start, he remembers being uncomfortable whenever he was engaged in sexual foreplay, it wasn't until years later during a therapy session that he was able to identify the source of the problem. His wife, by simply directing his hands to more stimulating areas on her body had in effect violated a sensitivity related to his sense of manhood. For Jonathan, it was "as if she were saying I didn't know what I was doing." Noteworthy, for this patient during the first year of his marriage, and characteristic of the phenomenon I am discussing, he was not fully aware of the experience that was having the greatest impact upon him. Rather, he was only aware of a shift in his mood as evidenced by an irritability toward his wife and a corresponding loss of any desire for sexual intercourse. Gradually, he began to dread going to bed with his wife. He eventually changed his sleeping habits, falling asleep long before his wife came to bed. Obviously, this situation placed great strain on the relationship. A vicious cycle of misunderstanding, reactive anger, hurts, counter hurts followed by more reactive anger ensued. This lead the couple further and further away from the original source of the disturbance. At this point it was especially difficult for this couple, and for any couple to

establish a mutually supportive dialogue, sufficient to reverse the chain of events that were undermining the intimacy that formerly existed.

INDIVIDUAL REACTIONS to such experiences are different for every person. However, one common element is that once an area of sensitivity is violated in one way or another, we often remain in state of readiness to perceive similar experiences again and again. This is the hallmark of "selective sensitivities". Once violated we shift from a state of calm, unguarded relatedness to a state of watchful vigilance. In this reactive state we are now inclined to be even more sensitive.

An insidious process begins and unknown to both partners the once stable and well balanced dominoes begin to tip. As each domino falls, momentum picks up as each love partner's sensitivities become increasingly heightened. There is characteristically a shift in the dynamics between the couple. Subtle violations are now replaced by gross, large scale violations of each others sensitivities. These are the one's that are evident to all parties concerned and escalate most situations of tension into outright arguments. Attempts to communicate one's feelings to the love partner are unfortunately unsuccessful because they are now framed in the form of a complaint. The injured lover complains about the "insensitivity" of the other. Such complaints most often evoke defensive counter complaints. Another common response is to view the complaint as inconsequential, thereby invalidating the lover's experience.



When such experiences happen over and over again, the cumulative impact is both a change in how we feel about ourselves and a transformation in how we experience the other person. The once admired and loved individual is gradually viewed with ever increasing distaste, even hatred. The end result is greater and greater distance and even withdrawal. Recall, the case of Ellen mentioned above. She went from thinking the world of her husband to hating him in three short years.

Some couples attempt to contain the freefall by avoiding areas of relating that have become contaminated by the repeated violations. This was the situation with Jonathan when he attempted to avoid sex altogether. A less dramatic example of how areas of relating are avoided might be simply circumventing discussion of specific subjects, that generally lead to arguments. One example is the frequently avoided subject of money matters. When areas of discussion become avoided, the result is an ever widening restriction in the ways in which the couple interacts with one another. The often heard statement, "we no longer have anything in common with each other", derives from this growing constriction in the areas of relating and communicating.

NOW THE MOST TROUBLESOME quality of these disturbing experiential moments which are caused by a violation of our unique "selective sensitivities" is that they occur at the micro-split second level of consciousness. By this, as I demonstrated above, I mean they are registered within a fleeting second. Thus, they are seldom recognized and given the thoughtful attention and



understanding they deserve. This complicates the picture and adds to the difficulty couples have in communicating and resolving their specific problem. Typically, once an area of sensitivity is, unbeknown to us violated, there is an automatic response. The automatic response takes two directions. Our response may take the form of an inner reactive shift in our feelings which may or may not lead to some behavioral act. The shift in feelings is either a change in our sense of self or a change our sense of the other. The behavior may serve to change how we feel toward ourselves or it may directed at the person who purposely or inadvertently violated our sensitivities. For example, whenever Jill who I mentioned above felt diminished after spending time with John she was known to spend hours shopping for the right blouse or cosmetic to restore her sense of beauty. In Jonathan's situation avoidance behavior followed what he perceived as an assault on his masculinity.

IT WOULD APPEAR that experiences existing outside of conscious awareness cannot be readily addressed and resolved. Is this the deep unconscious that Freud described and which requires years of analysis to overcome.

The answer to this question is both yes and no. Yes, it is unconscious, but not in the sense that Freud meant by this term. It is unconscious because we are not readily aware that anything has happened. This changes once we become attuned to our sensitivities. Once attutned to the subtle events that have the greatest impact upon us, we can change the domino effect. The

question begs, "How"?

To shift the escalation of disruptive exchanges between lovers, requires a shift in what it is that we are attuned to in the relationship. It is no secret, that as humans it is unavoidable and inevitable that we will fail in our efforts to please the other person in our lives. The gross failures require no extensive elaboration in this article. We are all aware of them and their impact upon us. The microscopic violations of our unique "selective sensitivities" is the dimension of human interaction that demands our attention. Because, without a doubt, each violation churns at the foundation of every relationship. Like the sea, little by little, each violation carries sand away from the shore, shifting the ground and eventually bringing down whatever is standing. Similarly, no single domino can remain standing unless the ground upon which it rests is sound.

#### IV

TO DATE, NO MODEL OF HUMAN RELATIONS, prepares us for understanding and responding effectively to THE SENSITIVITY FACTOR in our relationships. Below, I shall outline the steps that I have found essential for restoring derailed intimacy and for preserving a harmonious interpersonally satisfying future.

ONE: ACQUIRE KNOWLEDGE.

It has been said, that loving is an art. However, it is

becoming increasingly clear that loving is sustained by our human capacity to understand the nature of our own experiences as well as the experiences of those we love. No doubt, what everyone wants in a relationship is to be understood. Understanding, however, is an elusive element in the interactional dialogues that characterize many relationships. Our capacity to understand ourselves and others can be compromised by a host of personal factors not the least of which is a lack of knowledge to guide our understanding. Thus loving is not an art. It is a learned capability, that can either be facilitated or obstructed by a host of factors.

There are two kinds of knowledge we need to gain and develop. The first, general acquired knowledge, has to do with knowledge that is taught, knowledge that is learned. It is acquired knowledge that enhances our innate capabilities. With respect to the subject we are discussing, general knowledge refers to information that comes from scientific research. This information, helps us understand how the excess baggage that each of us carries into every relationship in the form of "selective sensitivities" is formed through experience. In acquiring general knowledge, we can learn to become more attentive and reflective about the subtle events between ourselves and others. This paves the way for enhancing our innate capacity for self observation - what is referred to as empathic introspection. In the same way that a psychotherapist relies on his theories to guide his empathic understanding, that is, his grasp of the person in his consulting room, general theoretical knowledge can also advance the empathic understanding of all people in their love relationships. The



knowledge communicated in this article will enable us to view ourselves, our love partners and our interactions differently. By reading this far, you have already taken the first step toward enhanced and sustained intimacy. In contributing to empathic introspection, by which I mean the guided act of looking within ourselves and attempting to comprehend the our personal experience we can refine our innate capacity for informed reflective inquiry, the most effective tool for discovering and comprehending our inner subjective world. Informed introspection is the tool for increasing the second type of knowledge, personal intuitive knowledge. This second type of knowledge is our human heritage. Through enhanced self observational capacities, that is reflective self awareness, we may become capable of recognizing and responding more effectively to the potentially disastrous interpersonal consequences that result from recurrent disruptive violations of what is most dear to us, our sense of self. Reflective self awareness, an inborn capacity is learned and refined through focused thinking directed at comprehending our unique inner world of experience. Finally, reflective self awareness includes a knowledge of all the ways we typically react to our uniquely recurring feelings.

By acquiring both general and personal knowledge we can forge the most effective instrument for identifying the "sensitivity factor" in ourselves and others.

TWO: REMEMBER ALWAYS - EMPATHY MEANS UNDERSTANDING

One of the most important abilities to nurture and develop is



the capacity to ACCEPT yourself and others, that is your feelings and the feelings of others without critical judgment. Strive for understanding not judgement. Understanding precludes judgement. Feelings are automatic. That is they are initially outside of our immediate control. This does not mean that they cannot be modified or changed dramatically. Rather, it means that once you accept a particular feeling as a current, unavoidable given, regardless of what the feeling may be, you have begun a process that puts into place a new observational platform from which to view yourself and others with understanding and reflective awareness. These are the two most powerful tools for self transformation. Judgement comes from a lack of understanding. It interferes with reflective self awareness and it almost always leads to self criticism which is diminishing and contributes very little to change and growth. At any given moment, if you are attempting to understand yourself or anyone else you cannot simultaneously be judging them. So remember, stay alert to whether you are attempting to understand yourself and others or lapsing into a judgemental attitude.

## TWO: STRIVE TO IDENTIFY YOUR UNIQUE AREAS OF SENSITIVITY

As mentioned above every individual has specific areas of sensitivity that are selective in nature which means they are activated in specific situations that are unique to you. Stay attuned to the shifts in your moods and feelings. Try to identify the feelings that recur over and over again. Do you feel recurrently diminished, less than others? Do you feel recurrently irritable, annoyed, angry, contemptuous or impatient with yourself

or toward others? Do you feel recurrently anxious, frightened? Do you feel repeatedly ashamed of yourself. Do you feel guilty about something specific or just about everything you do? Feelings do not emerge in a vacuum. Once you have identified the feelings that seem to recur over and over again, try to identify the context, the specific situation that triggers these feelings. Use your feelings and shifts in moods as telltales that something has happened. You have had some experience that has had an impact upon you. Develop a sense of curiosity about the change in your mood. Think about the situation. Reflect on your thoughts in that situation. Think about what you think about, no matter how fleeting these thoughts may be. Look at your experiences as an editor would examine film footage, frame by frame. Never negate the significance of a single frame, a single thought or feeling. Especially, when related to an important person in your love life. As you reflect upon your thoughts and feelings you will come to recognize your specific and unique areas of sensitivity and the meanings they have acquired.

THREE: STRIVE TO IDENTIFY YOUR CHARACTERISTIC WAYS  
OF RESPONDING TO DISTURBING FEELINGS WHEN AN AREA  
OF SENSITIVITY HAS BEEN VIOLATED.

As a way of modifying our disturbing feeling, all disturbing and disruptive feeling require a response in the form of thoughts or actions. Each individual over the course of his/her lifetime has developed a host of strategies for modifying these feelings as a way to enable themselves to experience a different, more positive feeling or set of feelings. Learn to monitor your reactive

thoughts and actions. See what impact they have in terms of their capacity to change how you feel. Strive to identify your specific set of strategies for each feeling and situation. Some of your reactive strategies you will observe will change how you feel for the better with little or no negative short or long term consequences. These reactive strategies are effective and should be noted and maintained. Other reactive strategies you will observe are ineffective. That is, they are either short lived, unreliable and therefore unable to modify how you feel significantly. In addition, some of these reactions may have immediate negative consequences, thus intensifying your negative feelings, and most importantly that may lay the groundwork for future life problems. The ineffective reactive strategies and their short and long term consequences should be noted and identified as reactions you must make a commitment to change.

FOUR: TRY TO APPRCIATE HOW YOUR SPECIFIC, SENSITIVITIES, FEELINGS AND REACTIVE STRATEGIES CONTRIBUTE TO THE VARIOUS WAYS IN WHICH YOU EXPERIENCE YOURSELF AND OTHERS.

Each individual has a sense of self and a sense of others. To speak of a sense of self and a sense of other refers to all the ways in which you generally view your self and others. The various senses of the self and the various senses of the other may be predominantly positive, predominantly negative or a mixture of both. But, for certain they are limited thematically. That is, they involve a limited number of images of ourselves and others. Identify what your primary sense of self and primary sense of



others may be and try to see what influences any changes in one or the other. This will provide you with not only a detailed map of how you view yourself and others but will provide you with clues to additional areas of sensitivity. Anytime there is a shift in our sense of self or other it reflects a violation of a vital area of sensitivity. Learn to examine your experiences prior to any shift. Remember, look for the little things, frame by frame.

FIVE:        SEARCH YOUR PAST

The secret to who you are is in your past. But do not focus too extensively on the gross events of your life. These are important and should be identified but try to focus on the recurrent moments that linger in your thoughts, the moments that seem to be insignificant but yet you find have always been available to your memory. Reflect on your parents personality, their attitudes, actions, tolerances and lack of tolerances. Were they able to tolerate your crying but unable to tolerate your anger? Were they able to tolerate your playfulness or were they always serious or fearful for your safety? Did they inhibit your natural tendencies to explore and learn about your environment? Were they critical in obvious and subtle ways? Did they strive to understand you? Do not look to blame your parents. This is not an exercise in gathering evidence for an indictment. It is an exercise to help you appreciate the origins of your sensitivities. Any knowledge you gain regarding your past will facilitate your understanding, help you to be less critical and judgemental toward yourself.



SIX: STRIVE TO INSERT A "REFLECTIVE PAUSE" BETWEEN THE MOMENT YOU SENSE A SENSITIVITY IS VIOLATED AND THE FEELINGS AND BEHAVIOR THAT TYPICALLY FOLLOW

In other words, try to think with understanding. This will modify the intensity of your feelings. Similarly, try to develop a reflective response to your feelings. This will further modify and facilitate the changes you most desire in the ways you customarily react to disturbing experiences. Once your capacity to reflect, not react is in place you will be better equipped to respond in the most appropriate way to the situation.

SEVEN: STRIVE TO IDENTIFY AND ACCEPT THE SENSITIVITIES AND REACTIVE STYLES OF THOSE PERSONS WITH WHOM YOU ARE INTIMATELY INVOLVED

It is natural and unavoidable that in our interactions with others we monitor their moods, feelings and behavior. As an effective means of comprehending the persons we are engaged with intimately, try to become an "empathic" observer. That is, in the same way that you focused and examined yourself non-judgementally, with curiosity, in the steps above, strive to attune yourself to the subtle, as well as the not so subtle changes in mood or behavior in those persons with whom there exists the potential for love, with whom you are in love or with whom you are struggling to stay in love. Inquire openly about them, try to comprehend the experience of the other, again without judgement. This will equip you with the necessary information to begin to work on the next step, the capacity for sustained empathic dialogues with your loved ones.

EIGHT: DEVELOP A CAPACITY FOR "EMPATHIC DIALOGUES"

Strive to communicate your sensitivities to your love partner in a way that results in his or her greater understanding of you. Discuss the impact you each have upon one another. When you came together you unavoidably engaged each others sensitivities in a unique fashion. During an empathic dialogue, each person strives for a state of neutrality, that is a non-reactive attitude, open to hear the others experience, history and complaints without becoming defensive. Without the discussssion escalating into an indictment of the other. Keep in mind that once <sup>an</sup> area of sensitivity has been violated you are in a state of vulnerability to experience additional violations. Your capcity for reflective thought is most likely to be compromised at such times. Stay alert to the presence of impatience. *IT MAY BE THE ONLY SIGNAL OF AN IMPENDING DERAILED DIALOGUE.*

NINE: BECOME A FACILITATOR FOR THE OTHER.

In every relationship one person may be better equipped to be understanding than the other. Strive to develop ways to enhance your partners self awareness and interactional AND communicative skills. Be patient. Support any effort at understanding. As long as one person in a relationship remains committed to developing a capacity for understanding there is hope for renewal.

TEN: REMEMBER - THIS IS HARD BUT REWARDING WORK

*STAY WITH IT.*